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'Get Me Carlucci' Is the Summons for the Quintessential Survivor

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"Get me Carlucci."

Presidents Kennedy, Nixon, Ford — and now President-elect Ronald Reagan — all have said that over the last 20 years.

That alone qualifies Frank Charles Carlucci III for the title of Washington's ultimate survivor. But his story is more interesting, and more significant, than that.

Carlucci, the outgoing deputy director of the CIA, glided through his confirmation hearing yesterday for the job of deputy secretary of defense. In the process, he showed that a practitioner of the art of the possible can easily bridge the ideological gap between a Carter and a Reagan.

Or, if you listen to the grumblings of the conservatives who tried to derail Carlucci's nomination to the second highest job at the Pentagon, he personifies the argument that the gap between Carter and Reagan turns out to be not as wide as they expected — or hoped.

Either way, Carlucci, 50, has what the Washington mighty perceive as the right stuff for the man behind the boss. How else can you explain such moves as these:

Chosen by Carter to help Stansfield Turner slim and cool down the CIA, Carlucci has now been approved by Reagan to help Caspar W. Weinberger fatten and heat up the Pentagon.

After first fighting Weinberger when he was at the old Department of Health, Education and Welfare in the Nixon years, Carlucci went on to be his deputy there.

As U.S. ambassador to Portugal in 1976, Carlucci followed the program for which his predecessor was fired, and succeeded, even though he bucked then-Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger.

And, after being stabbed in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) at one phase in his government career, Carlucci was hailed as a friend of the Congolese at another.

How does Carlucci do it?

"Frank is an operator," said a government executive who has watched Carlucci from the inside for the last two decades. "He's a first-class manager and doer. You can get oodles of brains to come to this town, who have all kinds of fancy, brilliant concepts, but they can't get the damn thing done. The problem is getting it to happen. Frank makes it happen."

Does this mean Carlucci is just a hired bureaucratic gun? A man with no idealistic principles, one who can work for anybody?

Sen. Jeremiah A. Denton (R-Ala.), decorated for his resistance to his North Vietnamese captors, eased into those questions at Carlucci's confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee yesterday.

"My own philosophy," answered Carlucci, a former Navy junior lieutenant, "is that we all have to compromise. That's what it's all about."

After all the pulling and hauling, shouting and stomping within the bureaucracy, the key question becomes, Carlucci continued, "Can I live with that decision? In three instances I had prepared to resign. The decisions did not go against me, so I didn't resign."

Discreetly, Carlucci did not volunteer what those decisions of principle were, and no senator on the committee bothered to ask.

Laminated onto Carlucci's demon-

strated bureaucratic skills, both in the front room and the back room, is the toughness associated with the coal country around his onetime home in Bear Creek, Pa., near Wilkes-Barre.

"He's a tough little monkey," his father once said of him. Carlucci wrestled for Princeton, as did Donald Rumsfeld, another government executive who said, "Get me Carlucci."

After graduating from Princeton in 1952, Carlucci went into the Navy for two years, serving as gunnery officer on the USS Rombach, then took one year of a two-year course at Harvard's graduate school of business administration. The making of the government operator probably started in 1955, when he tried private business as a management trainee with Jantzen Inc., the bathing suit and leisure clothing firm, and found he didn't like it.

Turning to government, Carlucci joined the Foreign Service in July 1956. The next year, he was economic officer at the U.S. Embassy in Johannesburg, South Africa. In 1960, he embarked on an explosive government career in the Belgian Congo, including a James Bond performance when a mob of Congolese attacked him and three other Americans after the government car in which they were riding struck and killed a Congolese cyclist in Leopoldville on Nov. 20, 1960.

He stayed with the Navy driver "at least until the others could get away," he said at the time. It wasn't until he got aboard a bus later and someone told him he was bleeding that he realized he had been stabbed in the back.

In 1962, Carlucci left Africa for a Washington desk job at State as Congolese political affairs officer. Then it was back to Africa in 1964 as consul general at Zanzibar, Tanzania. The Tanzanians expelled him in 1965 on the charge that he "engaged in subversive activities."